UNIT 4   TRIBES AND THE 'OTHERS'

4.0   OBJECTIVES

After completing this Unit you will be able to:

- understand the ways in which the concepts of the 'self' and 'other' are culturally produced;

- gain specific knowledge of several case studies in which various marks of distinction are used to create a unique cultural identity;

- detail examples of these phenomena in their local environment and analyze how their own social positions are socially constructed; and

- understand the complex issues involved in the elite's decision-making process regarding the tribes and environmental issues.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit will examine the way that cultural identity is expressed through the process of inclusion and exclusion. The distinctions between self and other occur within a particular culture, and what are important in that culture's relationship with the outside world will be explained. The Unit will also examine the complex interplay between distinct cultural groups, in this case tribal units and larger governmental-political structures, and how the binary of self and 'other' is employed both in resistance and repression.

4.2 THE TRIBES

This section will examine how the term tribe is used, its political and social meanings, and the way it is expressed through specific cultural practices. In India, the 'tribe' has a specific political and administrative meaning. A tribe is also connected with a geographic area, a linguistic group (or groups) and specific cultural practices. According to Singh (1999) there are currently 461 tribes in India and 172 segments, which result in a total of 635 tribes, their segments and territorial units. In 1981, the total population of scheduled tribes in India was 51,628,638, the majority of which reside in rural areas (Singh: 1999). The designation of a group as a 'scheduled tribe' results in certain privileges and funding opportunities. The lack of such a designation can give rise to protests, as seen in the recent Gujar agitations throughout India.

Let us now determine what we mean by a tribe. A tribe is a concept that describes specific, localized ethnic groups sharing linguistic and cultural practices, and generally having their own cosmologies and cosmogonies. The tribal unit can often have practices which are seen as objectionable to both the colonial powers and orthodox Hindus, resulting in both cultural and political conflicts. Often these conflicts can also mask the exploitation of resources and labour. A component of the process of exploitation often involves designating a particular social group as an 'other', and thus allows for the intellectual and moral justification for exploitation.

The relation of tribes to India is complex. As the colonial powers defined the 'other', so the colonized used similar models to define themselves against an 'other', whether this be caste, tribes, or religious distinctions. In order to clarify how the concept of the tribe applies to specific social groups, we will now look at several examples of tribal cultures as case studies which will be discussed later. For the colonial powers, the tribes were often viewed as the 'noble savages' untouched peoples who were being corrupted by Sanskrit influences. Of course, this viewpoint did not, in any way, limit the exploitation of the tribes by various commercial interests, including the tea industry. A systematic attempt was made to include tribes into larger political and economic structures, with the result that feudal, hierarchical social systems were strengthened.

After the colonial era in India, the concept of the tribe, as constructed through colonial anthropology was employed to differentiate tribal social systems. The tribe, often seen as a distinctive social unit, is opposed to nationalist ideology. A

tribal social configuration can also be opposed to capitalistic notions of production and consumption. It is said to be following its economic system. Finally, a tribal unit creates a counter narrative of their own religion to the meta-narratives of dominant religious belief systems, which often results in attempts through missionary programs to convert the tribal to a major religion. Let us now look into the specific characteristics of tribes.

4.2.1   Characteristics of specific tribes

In order to define a tribe properly, it is necessary to include the components or characteristics that are significant to this definition. A tribe can be defined as a self-contained social, linguistic, cultural, and geographically defined unit. The tribe, then, represents a level of social organization which predates that of the nation-state, the kingdom, and other large-scale forms of social organization. It then follows that a tribe presents certain problems for these larger forms of social and political organization. A tribe represents a social configuration which is not dependant upon or agreed upon economic, religious, and social norms of these larger social formations, whether those belonging to religions, nation-states, and trans-national corporations.

A tribe must have a distinctive language, or a distinctive use of elements of other surrounding languages. This linguistic component is important in maintaining a separate cultural identity. A tribe must also have a body of distinct cultural practices and beliefs, although these can, and often are, permeated by the cultural practices of surrounding societies. These distinctive cultural practices are often expressed through modes of dress, the construction and topography of villages, and distinct modes of religious worship. Tribal groups also have economic and political systems which are connected with the general configuration of society. Most tribes have their own distinct social hierarchies and corresponding divisions of labour, influenced to a varying degree by outside and internal changes. A few case studies of tribes have been discussed below to show some of the characteristics of them.

4.2.2   Case study I: the Mal Paharias of Bihar

Tribes represent the convergence between social and spatial geography. For most tribal groups, their relationship to their immediate local environment is an important foundation of their religious, cultural, and economic systems. The Mal Paharias inhabit the Dumka and Southern area of the Sahebganj district of the Santhal Parganas of Bihar (Singh: 714). The exact origins of the Mal Paharias are controversial, with many scholars holding differing opinions on how they came to settle in this area. The Mal Paharias have their own original myths, and at one time had a distinct language. However, their current language contains a number of elements taken from Bengali (Kumar: 1986). The primary means of sustenance of the Mal Paharias is subsistence agriculture, which makes living difficult within the rugged mountainous terrain that they inhabit.

The Mal Paharias maintain their identity through cultural practices, language, and also the geographic area that they inhabit. A number of scholars, including Kumar (1986) believe that this group needs to be modernized and included in the broader framework of the culture at large. In this case, the tribes are seen as an 'other' that is precluded from modern society because of their primitive cultural

and economic conditions. However, the Mal Paharias also see themselves as a distinctive cultural group, to which Indian society as a whole is also seen as 'other'.

4.2.3   Case study II: the Bondos

The Bondo tribe, inhabiting the mountainous area of Orissa, has a number of cultural features which distinguish them from mainstream society. The Bondos are divided into three groups- those inhabiting the foot of the Bondo hills, who maintain economic and other ties with surrounding communities, Bondos residing in mixed agricultural communities, and those who inhabit the Bondo hills, who are generally hostile to outsiders.

The Bondo tribe has a distinctive language, and most of the Bondos are illiterate. Their practice of dormitories that permit the mingling of young men and women before marriage has often been the subject of controversy. Clean-shaven heads, headbands, and necklaces mark the Bondo women. The Bondos divide themselves into two clans, that of the Ontal (cobra) and the Killo (tiger). Common mythological ancestors link the kinship groups. Their religion includes worship of their traditional deities mixed with certain elements of Hinduism. In the Bondo tribe, we can see many of the elements which define tribes. They are linked with a specific geographic area, have a distinct language group, and unique cultural practices. These elements, along with their religious beliefs, give the Bondo a distinct identity, which sets them apart both from other tribes and majority culture.

Through these two examples, we can see that tribal identity is linked to a number of factors, and the disruption of some or many of these elements can result in the disappearance of the tribe.

4.2.4   Case study: Nomadic tribes

Certain tribal groups do not localize themselves in specific settlements, but instead follow patterns of migration. These groups are known as nomads. Some scholars have viewed this nomadic way of life as a remnant of primitive cultural forms which are no longer relevant and in fact are opposed to modern social practices. Nomads travel from place to place, some gather food, and some sustain themselves through cattle and other types of livestock. One characteristic of nomad culture is the general lack of private property. This type of lifestyle requires a type of communal cohesion that goes against the basic suppositions of the capitalist economic model. Nomadic people can be basically classified under four broad categories: (1) Hunter/gatherer nomads; (2) Pastoral nomads, (3) Trader nomads and (4) Agricultural nomads. Nomads have often been associated with magical powers, criminal activities, and raids on centers of civilization. The negative associations with nomads have a number of origins. For one, nomads represent a lifestyle which is fundamentally opposed to the rules and structures of organized societies. They are often used as scapegoats for the 'shadow side' or the unacknowledged dark side of civilization. Nomads have also been idealized as representative of a type of freedom which is unavailable to the civilized man.

Nomadic tribes, by the nature of their lifestyle, represent a fundamental 'other' to sedentary civilizations. The nomads themselves are perpetually on the margins and the borders between the civilized and uncivilized. This particular social

configuration has much in common with other types of tribes, including linguistic, social, and religious distinctions which allow them to maintain their unique identity. It has often been the case that nomads, once they have ceased their nomadic lifestyle, will gradually begin to take on characteristics of dominant social groups around them.

Check your progress 1

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers at the end of the Unit.

1) Describe some of the characteristics of a tribe.

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

2) List the tribes described above and how they fit the definition given for tribe.

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

3) From the readings, and in your own opinion how do tribes represent an 'other' for non-tribal society?

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

4.3 THE 'OTHERS'

After having understood what we mean by a tribe and also having looked at its characteristics with some examples of the case studies, let us now understand what we mean by the 'other' and what its features are.
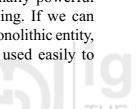
4.3.1 Essentialism and the construction of the 'other'

Identity is a process of inclusion and exclusion. A person takes on an identity through social practices, language, and many other factors. Identity is often constructed through the negative- "I am not this, I am not that." Thus, the construction of the 'other' is part of this process, which is done through the use of essentialism. Essentialism is a way in which certain characteristics are taken as representative of racial, ethnic or cultural group. It is the simplistic construction of the 'other' through broadly applicable terms. An example of essentialism is the statement "Blacks are lazy", common throughout the colonial world. Here we can see how Blacks are defined as the 'other' by the usage of such strong negative connotations. This creates a category in which a whole segment of society is ascribed a certain designation that enables a reflexive or an unthinking, unfavourable response to the 'other'.

The process of essentialism is common in today's post-colonial world as well. We need look no further than to the current 'War on Terror' propagated by the United States Government. An important component of the propaganda effort of this war has been to portray the Islamic world as the 'other', as something to be feared, and as something that can be understood on an instinctual, pre-conscious level. Certain images are used to create these reactions, based on broad assumptions regarding culture. Images of bearded Islamic militants waving rifles, women clad in *burkas* (Islamic head-scarves), burning of books, and video clips of beheadings all add to the construction of the 'other' through essentialism. Thus by the use of these images negative connotations are created in the minds of people.

In the example given above, the creation of the 'other' also allows for the definition of the boundaries of the self. In this case, the West is posited as the opposing force to 'Islamic extremism' witnessed in words, images, and symbols. For example, the West is democratic; Islam is fascist, fundamentalist and repressive. The West gives women scope and freedom- Islamic women are forced to stay at home and wear clothing that covers their faces and bodies. The West promotes freedom of information, Islam burns books. This list can go on endlessly; however, the fundamental process should be clear. In this case the other is constructed through the juxtaposition of words and images, creating an immediate emotional response. Certain characteristics are used to broadly describe an entire group (or groups) of people, which are opposed in a binary relation with the self.

However, this process often has a number of underlying motivations, some of which are actually obscured through the use of images and essentialism. One advantage of using essentialism as expressed through emotionally powerful images is that it simplifies the process of cultural understanding. If we can understand (or assume that we understand) another culture as a monolithic entity, it gives a feeling of certainty. This sense of certainty can be used easily to propagate religious and political conflict and violence.

In the case mentioned, we see that desired goal, expressed through words and images, and are shown as to bring 'democracy' to the Middle East. This obscures both the history of the region, the complexity factions involved, and the particular geo-strategic goals of the United States. In this case, however laudable the desire to propagate democracy is, it must be counter-balanced with the desire for the control of resources. In this case oil is never mentioned; however, even a cursory analysis of the situation reveals that this is one of the primary and underlying motivations for political and military interventions.

The construction of the 'other' can also be done in such a way to exaggerate certain positive traits, creating the other as an idealized self. This process generally uses essentialism in similar ways, but instead of negative images, positive portrayals are employed. In the case of tribes, the culture can be essentialised as 'close to nature', 'pure', and in harmony with the natural environment. This can easily be contrasted with the frantic nature of modern, industrialized and urbanized life. In this way, certain images can be employed, for example, a farmer sowing rice on a verdant mountainside, and contrasted with slums, pollution, or other images of urban decay. These essentialist conceptions can be used for the benefit or the detriment of the tribal groups.

4.3.2   The colonial construction of the 'other'.

The construction of the 'other' was a hallmark of many colonial enterprises. As mentioned above, similar processes are common in the current post-colonial era. The reasons for these cultural, social, and political constructions were numerous. One of the most important reasons was that of social control. It was crucial for the colonized to maintain a highly inequitable distribution of wealth and power. The creation of a socially and culturally segmented system allowed for the justification of the imperial project in such a way that it could be described as a process 'bringing civilization'. However, as in the example discussed above, this masked what was in most cases, simply the commercial exploitation of the resources of foreign countries. Another important reason for the essentialised concept of the 'other' is that it kept social distinctions between the colonized and colonizers. In the early years of the British expansion in India, many British and those of other nationalities adopted indigenous customs, lifestyles, and traditions. This was known by the condescending term of 'going-native'. Many of these early colonizers began to have an appreciation of Indian culture, something that could be dangerous to project of expansion and control. It is much easier to repress large segments of native society when they can be seen as something that is less than human. This changed after the 1857, first war of independence. Following this war, the British began to openly despise native culture, and the more open-minded stance of early colonialists began a rarity. At the same time, these types of distinctions between self/other and civilized/ uncivilized began an important part in the creation of native elite who would be sympathetic with and could serve a number of functions within the "Raj". This project was in line with general strategy of 'divide and rule' wherein various segments of the society were pitted against each other. The value of the 'divide and rule' strategy in the minds of the Raj was that it prevented large-scale revolts which encompassed various strata of society. This configuration was witnessed in the first war of independence. It became important to maintain and emphasize social and cultural differences in order to maintain power and domination over the colonies.

This constructed 'other' was often linked with race, which associated specific races with either positive or negative characteristics. Thus, even the traditional Vedic culture was viewed as something that was a remnant of a previously extant but now deceased great civilization. Branches of science were developed along these lines, including the measurement of physical characteristics as indication of the intellectual and moral development of specific races. In the case slavery, this distinction between races was used as a justification for acts of profound cruelty. Many of the excesses and violence perpetrated against Indians by the British had their origins in this belief system.

The idea of the 'other' was also important in the development of anthropology. The earlier forms of anthropology used a model of cultural evolution based on the theories of Charles Darwin. The ideas of 'survival of the fittest' and of cultural evolution were founded on these principles. These ideas posited that, just as man had evolved from the apes, so too societies were evolving, and were in various stages of evolution, towards the perceived superiority of Western civilization. This meant that a tribal cultural represented a snapshot of human evolution in general, and justified the destruction and relocation of tribal peoples in the name of 'bringing civilization'.

4.3.3 Colonialism, Christianity, and *Sanskritization*

The process of colonization often worsened divisions within tribal cultures between the rich and poor, as well as the growth of private property. The growth of private property led to the increased power of the *dikus* (professional tribal money lenders) and a consolidation of land and power in fewer hands. These economic processes were also mirrored in the process of *sanskritization,* or upward mobility by certain tribes and/or segments within tribes who opted for a position in the caste hierarchy. Examples of this include the Santhals who began wearing a sacred thread, the Mahtos, and many other tribes and tribal leaders who sought to gain a place in the caste system. This increased the economic division between members of tribes, and brought them closer to a capitalistic/ feudal social and economic structure. This brought tribes within the hierarchical status system of mainstream society.

Check your progress 2

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers at the end of the Unit.

3) What is essentialism?

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

---

4) Why is the construction of the 'other' often linked to political and cultural agendas?

    ....

    ....

    ....

    ....

    ....

    ....

5) Why was the construction of the 'other' so important for the colonial project? Give one or two specific examples of this.

    ....

    ....

    ....

    ....

    ....

4.4 THE DISTINCTION MARK

As we have defined the concept of 'others' it becomes important for us to understand what the distinction marks that define others are. The next section will discuss these points in details.

4.4.1 Categories of the distinction mark

So far we have discussed a number of points related to the development of the concepts of the self and other. We will now look at specific markers of both self and 'other'. These include language, environment, social customs, religion, styles of dress, diet, and political and economic systems. These examples will be examined through the specific case studies mentioned previously.

4.4.2 Language

Language is a very important 'mark of distinction'. Even within a specific language, the use of certain formal constructions, proper or improper grammar, and vocabulary can mark an individual as a member of a certain class. The presence or lack of a written language also represents a social group's position in the cultural hierarchy. Language also represents the history of a particular group and can show cultural interactions with other groups. There are numerous examples of this. We need look no further than the Hindi language spoken in Northern India. Hindi contains elements of Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, and English. The usage of these 'loan words', which are an intrinsic part of the language, clearly show the cross-cultural contact and influence of other cultures. During the long period of Islamic expansion in India, many Persian, Arabic and Turkish words became part of Hindi. In a similar manner, many English words are commonly used in Hindi. The use of specific vocabularies can also serve to

demonstrate one's identity in relation to a given cultural paradigm. An example of this is the use of specific vocabularies in Hindi. If a speaker uses a greater concentration of Urdu words the speaker could be expressing an Islamic identity, a cultured persona, or simply a regional background. If a speaker uses English words, on the other hand, the speaker could be representing their educational background, a desire to express a modern persona, or simply the habits of language.

Language is more than simply words, or a means of communication. It expresses fundamental beliefs and paradigms of a given group. A common example of this is the fact that the Eskimos have one hundred words for snow, while English has only a handful. Language is a way of both representing and evaluating experience. Language, in this sense, is a window on the world, showing what is important to a given group, and what is not included as part of their experiences. Some tribes do not have the past tense, which indicates a far different experience of time than that of other languages. Certain other tribes have language which is deeply grounded in their immediate environment. An example of this is the Suha tribe of the Brazilian rainforest, which bases their language and social interactions of a variety of birds and bird songs. Thus, the function of a given language is to represent a cohesive and holistic integration of the individual, the social, and their environment.

For tribals, language is a factor for unity within a given tribe, and can also represent 'otherness' in relation to other cultures. The language of a given tribe can also represent the amount of contact with the outside world, the amount or desire for assimilation into larger society, and the historical and cultural origins of a given tribe. We will now look at some specific case studies to see how language is a 'mark of distinction'.

4.4.3　Language case studies

There are considered to be four main language groups among the tribes in India. These language groups, which are localized in broad geographic areas: the Austria, Tibet-Chinese, Dravidian and Indo-Aryan. These language groups are broken down into seven further subdivisions, which contain some regional overlap where two language groups are intermingled (Raze and Ahmad: 1990). These language groupings are important indicators of the origins of the given tribes, the duration of their presence in a particular area, and larger migratory patterns throughout history.

Our first case study, mentioned in section 4.2.1 was the Mal Paharias, who inhabit the Dumka province of Bihar and also the Murshidabad district of Bengal. The Mal Paharias are largely illiterate. The language that they utilize in Dumka is a corrupt form of Bengali at home, and a regular form of Bengali with others. In the Murshidabad district of Bengal they speak a Dravidian language at home, known as Malto. In interactions with the outside world they speak Bengali and Urdu. This phenomenon indicates a certain degree of cultural influence from non-tribals. The use of differing languages at home indicates the maintenance of a distinct cultural identity. Among the Mal Paharias of West Bengal, we see a phenomenon common throughout the world. Diasporic groups (peoples that have migrated to different locations) tend to maintain earlier forms of language which are no longer used by the main segment of the population. Other examples of

this include the use of archaic vocabulary among the speaker of the Persian dialects of Tajik and Dari.

In the case of the Bondo tribe, we see the usage of the language Bondo, part of the Austro-Asiatic language family. Some other Bondos who have greater interaction with the outside world, speak and write some Oriya. However, the Bondos who inhabit the hills and are hostile to outsiders retain their own cultural identity and do not speak Oriya. This demonstrates how language functions as an important mark of distinction. To maintain a language indicates the retention of traditional cultural forms and values.

Throughout India, there are a number of patterns of language having both assimilation and retention. In a number of areas, certain tribes have lost their own dialect and adopted the dominant tribal dialect of the region. This indicates a greater cultural assimilation into the dominant culture of region. Examples of this include the Bhils and Gonds who no longer speak their own dialects. Other patterns of change are seen where tribes have had frequent contact with the outside world. An important vehicle for this was missionary activity, which encouraged both literacy and wider contact with the world around them. Still other examples of linguistic change occur in areas of cultural overlap. Finally, more isolated tribes tend to maintain their own language, which indicates both the lack of influence of the outside world and/or a strong desire to maintain their unique culture.

4.4.4 Dress and ornaments

The use of particular dress and ornaments among tribes are important marks of distinction. A particular style of dress immediately indicates a particular culture group, and can be a much more direct mark of distinction than language. Dress and ornaments are important both within and outside tribes. Ornaments and styles of dress are often indicators of an individual's status within a given tribe. To the outside world, they immediately distinguish the tribal from mainstream society. Styles of dress and ornaments are also important between tribes themselves, and particular segments of tribes. Particular ornaments can have very culturally specific meanings among proximal tribes. The preference for particular styles of dress also indicates the degree of influence the outside world has had on a tribe. Many times, the men of a particular tribe will adopt Western-style dress, while the women will maintain traditional styles of dress and ornaments. There are a number of factors that influence this, one of the most important is that men tend to have greater interaction with non-tribal cultures, often going to urban centers for employment, or engaging in trade.

We will now again look at some case studies. With the Mal Paharias, we find that those who live closer to the plains have adopted a style of dress influenced by the larger society. Many of the men wear dhotis and lungis, while the women often wear saris and blouses. Women also wear less clothing as the distance increases from the plains. The Mal Paharias do not use much ornamentation. The women often wear glass bangles brought from weekly markets. The lack of tribe-specific ornamentation could indicate simple tribal tradition, or could demonstrate the process of cultural assimilation and erosion.

The Bondo people have very specific styles of dress and ornaments. Traditional dress is found among both men and women. The women of the tribe wear a style

dress which is very scanty. The women's ornaments are very ornate. These ornaments consist of a number of bead necklaces and aluminium necklaces and bracelets. The women also shave their heads and wear headbands of glass or beads. In Bondo culture, children are naked until the age of six or seven. The Bondos produce their own clothing on traditional looms from materials gathered from the forest. The men wear a traditional hand woven loincloth. The Bondos express their unique culture through their style of dress. The means of production of clothing and ornaments is connected with their economic system. Their economy eschews money and is based on the barter system. As compared to the Mal Paharias, the Bondos strongly maintain their culture, which is expressed through both language and dress. A Bondo tribesman is immediately recognizable by their unique style of dress.

From these two brief examples it is apparent that maintenance of culture-specific styles of dress and ornamentation is a strong indicator of the vitality of their culture. It also indicates the degree of influence from the outside world on their culture.

4.4.5 Customs, environment and religion

Another central mark of distinction is that of cultural customs, religious beliefs, and relation to the environment. These include everything from marriage customs, music, calendrical festivals, religious ceremonies, and economic systems. The maintenance of rituals and marriage customs often survive longer than other marks of distinction such as language and dress and ornaments. These forms of cultural expression are fundamental to the construction of unique tribal identities. Shared cultural practices create a feeling of solidarity among members of a particular tribe, and often differentiate them from other tribes and members of the plains. Rituals and festivals are of central importance to tribal identity, and can even survive in a modified form after religious conversion and prolonged contact with the outside world. Connected with these customs are often unique myths of the origin of the people, and their relation to the environment. The environment can also shape and dictate many of these customs and beliefs as well.

4.4.6 Case studies of cultural practices

Similar to other marks of distinctions, cultural practices take place on a continuum of outside influence. We will now look at some of the cultural practices and beliefs of the Mal Paharia tribe. The Mal Paharia tribe has a religious belief system which is influence by both their environment and many elements of the Hindu faith. The Mal Paharias believe in the concept of karma and rebirth central to Hinduism. They also worship a number of deities and nature spirits which are related to their immediate environment. For the Mal Paharias, nature and the season are spiritual forces. Their main deities are the sun and the earth, and they also worship the mountains. Animal sacrifices are common, as are festivals conducted to insure a good harvest. They have many seasonal festivals, some of which are Hindu in origin, and some of which are based upon animistic beliefs (the worship of nature). The influence of Bengali culture is visible in the annual Kali Puja. The Kali Puja is of central importance to Bengali culture, but in the case of Mal Paharias the goddess Kali is represented by a stone, and not by an image. The worship of the god Shiva is also important to the Mal Paharis. Their

religious practices are thus a mirror of the degree of cultural influence and environmental influence on their beliefs.

Through these cultural practices they maintain both their unique identity as well as their connections with non-tribal cultures.

The Jaunsaries, a tribe who inhabit the northwest Himalayas, also have a great degree of both animistic and Hindu practices in their religious and cultural beliefs. The Jaunsaries religious practices also reveal the impact of caste and economic stratification on their society. Certain castes, especially the *bajgis* the caste of hereditary musicians are associated with the aboriginal inhabits of the region, and thus have a low position in the caste hierarchy. Higher castes, like the *Bhramins* and the land-owning *kshestrias* maintain social and economic dominance through both religion and the ownership of property. However, among the Jaunsaries, different castes have differing interpretations of these religious rites, and thus lower castes are able to maintain a degree of agency even in the midst of social disparity. Through the example of the Jaunsaries we can see that there a number of levels that cultural marks of distinction are employed. These cultural markers function both within and without the tribal society. In the case of the Jaunsaries we can see how a single tribal society has many modes of relating to the world at large, at times accommodating and influenced by non-tribal culture, at other times asserting their unique identity.

There are, of course, numerous other examples of cultural marks of distinction. It should also be clear that cultural influences can occur and operate on a number of channels. For example, economic changes can often influence the social structures and the religious and cultural practices which support it. Cultural and religious changes can also result in economic and social changes.

Check your progress 3

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers at the end of the Unit.

7) What are the types of the marks of distinction?

....

....

....

....

....

8) Why is language an important mark of distinction?

....

....

....

....

....

9) Describe some of the marks of distinction of the Bondo tribe.

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

4.5 CULTURE CLASH

Having understood both tribes and others and their marks of distinction let us look into the clash of cultures.

4.5.1 What is culture clash?

Cultural clash, and its larger variant of the 'clash of civilizations' occurs on a number of levels. As mention in a pervious section, many times the clash of cultures is brought about by conflicting economic and political agendas. Sometimes this is expressed in religious and cultural terms. How does cultural clash occur? One of the basic elements is a conflict over space and resources. As land becomes scarcer, as eco systems are devastated through pollution or industrial and hydroelectric projects, those with the least economic and social development often lose out. Most of the major cities throughout India and in many parts of the world are filled with environmental and economic refuges, which have been forced to flee their homes and make a new life in an urban environment. We can see that a tribal culture is intimately connected both with a particular environment, lifestyle, and numerous marks of distinction construct their unique identity. The clash of cultures thus occurs on multiple levels. Many types of cultural clash occur when larger concerns, such as that of nationalism, seek to include tribes within the broader framework of mainstream culture. The process of creating the 'other' also produces a similar movement towards either including the 'other' in a larger social system, or the marginalization and destruction of the 'other's' culture. These processes have also produced a great deal of backlash, as seen in insurgent and revolutionary movements such as the Naxalites. In these movements, many times the 'marks of distinction' are used as way to develop solidarity among tribal peoples against perceived enemies. Culture clash also occurs because of different customs and practices. An example of this is the polyandry of the Jaunsaries and the dormitories of the Bondo tribe.

4.5.2 Case study: modes of resistance

In resistance movements to cultural suppression, language is an important component. Most of the tribal resistance movements have stressed the importance of language. Most practices of social repression and discrimination also emphasize the repression of tribal languages. The movement to restore tribal

languages, found among the Prepak and the PLA, to name a few examples, are closely linked with the mantainence of cultural identity and political and economic sovereignty. Most of the tribal movements have begun because of land alienation. Marks of distinction provide and important means of resistance to these forces, because they emphasize cultural solidarity.

Another example of a resistance movement based on reaction to land reform policies and cultural displacement was that of the Gonds and the Bhils. Many of these tribals felt that they were being discriminated against, and so agitated for a separate state. This was also based on perceived the lack of interest in the government. Cultural clash occurs on a variety of levels, but it is most often precipitated by environmental and resource-based conflicts. These types of culture clash are often expressed through uprisings, strikes, and terrorist activities. Many times specific marks of distinction such as language, religion and customs are important components of these resistance movements.

Check your progress 4

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers at the end of the Unit.

10) What is the main reason for culture clash?

....

....

....

....

11) Name two tribes who agitated for a separate state.

....

....

....

....

....

12) Why is language important in culture clash?

....

....

....

....

....

....

4.6 POINTS TO CONSIDER BY THE PRIVILEGED AND INFLUENTIAL

The role of the privileged and the influential becomes important here. Let us now discuss that.

4.6.1 Questions for the elites

Looking at the various discussions until this point, let us examine the responsibility of elites in relationship to tribal groups. We have discussed a number of factors which are important in the process of creating the 'other'. For elites, there are a number of concerns to balance in the relations between tribal/indigenous people and the needs and concerns of other sectors of society. One the most important factors to consider is cultural preservation. Is it important to preserve earlier modes of societies? Do the lifestyles of tribes and their relationship with their environment represent an important cultural heritage? Another aspect to consider is the control over resources. Many tribal groups live in environments which are resource rich. Who should decide who owns the land? Who gets to decide the fate of particular ecosystems? And who should manage these resources?

4.6.2 Cultural preservation

It takes only a brief survey of anthropological literature from the early twentieth century to the present to see that many times traditional cultures are viewed as relic in the modern world. This has been a common idea for many centuries. It is a complex question that needs multiple viewpoints in order to make intelligent decisions. The idea of culture evolution, discussed previously, is very biased. In this model, a particular type of society is taken as a model for an ideal society. Other modes of life are seen as being primitive. It follows from this viewpoint that the dominant and more powerful culture would see the change and modification of traditional cultures as an important agenda. However, these programs often contain political and economic agendas. On the other hand, these programs can also bring great benefits to tribal groups. In order to make decisions it is important to see that every culture is relative. There is no particular viewpoint or lifestyle that is fundamentally better than any other. However, this should be balanced with the inputs of modern science and technology, and to assess the functionality of that particular traditional culture.

4.6.3 Resources

Another important factor to consider by the privileged is the management and allocation of resources. The fact is that many decisions in this regard are made with very short-term interests in mind. Biological diversity is important for the survival and health of the overall ecosystem. Human cultural diversity is important for the maintenance of healthy societies. In fact, human society and resources availability and intimately linked. It is easy to forget, when one purchases a factory made product that it involved a complex series of transactions in order to reach the shelf of a store. In the modern world, it is easy to forget that we are dependent upon our environment for our survival. Tribal groups that live on the land are clearly aware of this. In making policies for development and use of resources it is necessary to balance all of these factors. Sometimes tribal groups have a better understanding of the environment than government agencies. It is

always important to factor the local into the larger equation of the regional, national, and global ecosystem.

Check your progress 1

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers at the end of the Unit.

13) What are some important points to consider by elites?

    ....

    ....

    ....

    ....

    ....

14) Why is cultural preservation a complex issue?

    ....

    ....

    ....

    ....

    ....

15) Why is resource rights important?

    ....

    ....

    ....

    ....

    ....

4.7   LET US SUM UP

In this module we have covered many aspects of the relationship between tribes, non-tribal societies, and elite interests. We have seen how the 'other' is a construction that is dependant on many factors. We have looked at the impact of colonial policies on India. Through a number of case studies, some of the specific aspects of tribal cultural that serve as 'marks of distinction' have been examined. The impact of the outside world on various aspects of tribal culture has been examined. We have seen the importance of language as a means of constructing a unique identity. Finally, the impact and the importance of the decisions of elites upon tribal culture have been described through the complex variables at work.

4.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

1) A tribe is an ethnic, culturally and linguistically unified group. In India, the 'tribe' has a specific political and administrative meaning. Tribes often inhabit specific geographic areas.

2) The Mal Paharias live in a specific geographic area. They have their own myths, culture, and their own version of Bengali. They live as subsistence farmers and are dependant on their environment. The Bondo tribe has their own language, unique style of dress, and cultural practices. They are linked with a specific geographic area, have a distinct language group, and unique cultural practices. These elements, along with their religious beliefs, give the Bondo a distinct identity, which sets them apart both from other tribes and majority culture. Nomadic peoples have their own cultural practices that set them apart from mainstream society, but usually are not localized in one region.

3) Tribes represent an 'other' because they have different language, customs, and lifestyles from modern society. Tribes also have different economic systems, and are dependant on their immediate environment for survival.

4) Essentialism is the use of broad definitions for whole groups of people. In this practice, certain characteristics are used to define whole groups of people. Essentialism is often connected with racism and discriminatory practices.

5) The construction of the other is used to create separation between different social, ethnic, and religious groups. It can create emotional responses, and allows for types of exploitation that would be difficult if the 'other' were seen as complex human beings. Finally, the construction of the other aids in the definition of the self in relation to other societies and cultures.

6) The colonial project used the construction of the 'other' to promote solidarity among the ruling class. It was also used to divide societies internally to make the process of control and domination easier. Divisions between Hindus and Muslims were encouraged by the British as a means of control. The war on terror, an extension of the colonial project, creates a common enemy for the West.

7) Marks of distinction include language, environment, social customs, religion, styles of dress, diet, and political and economic systems.

8) Language is a very important 'mark of distinction'. Even within a specific language, the use of certain formal constructions, proper or improper grammar, and vocabulary can mark an individual as a member of a certain class. The presence or lack of a written language also represents a social group's position in the cultural hierarchy. Language also represents the history of a particular group and can show cultural interactions with other groups. Language also represents a way of seeing the world, and the preservation of a language is an important part of cultural preservation.

9) The Bondo people have very specific styles of dress and ornaments, for example women's ornaments consist of a number of bead necklaces and aluminum necklaces and bracelets. The women also shave their heads and

wear headbands of glass or beads. The Bondos produce their own clothing on traditional looms from materials gathered from the forest. The men wear a traditional hand woven loincloth. Their economy eschews money and is based on the barter system. They have a unique language and cultural practices.

10) Conflict over land and resources.

11) The Gonds and the Bhils.

12) Language is an important means of culture continuity and creates community solidarity. The removal or death of languages through outside influence or deliberate policies makes distinct cultures hard to sustain. Language movements are often central to resistance movements.

13) Cultural preservation, use of resources, political agendas.

14) Cultural preservation requires that other societies are seen as valuable, and viewed as a heritage. It also means understanding other cultures.

15) There are many competing factions fighting over resources. It is important to weigh the benefits for certain groups with the problems faced by other groups. Finally, one must see the interconnected nature of man and his environment.

4.9   REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

Kumar, Alok. *Tribal Culture and Econmy: The Mal Paharias of Santal Parganas.* Inter-India Publications: New Delhi. 1986

Singh, K.S. *Tribal Society in India.* Banares and Delhi: Manohar, 1986.

Mann, R.S. *Nature, Man Spirit Complex in Tribal India.* New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1981.

Raghaviah, V. *Nomads.* New Delhi, Baharateeya Adimajati Sevak Sang, 1968.

Dirks, Nicholas B. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India.* New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.

Singh, K.S. *India's Commnities Vol. 1 –9.* New Delhi: Anthropological Survey of India, 1998.

Tribes of Orissa. Orissa: ST and SC Development Department, Government of Orissa2004.

Sharma, R.N. and Bakshi, Santosh. *Tribes and Tribal Development.* New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1984.

Nathan, Dev. *From Tribe to Caste.* Replika Press: Delhi, 1999.